

# COLLECTING Linnware WITH MARIAN BAKER

This Jo'burg collector's passion for Linnware has grown with her knowledge and collection

“It was the rich, turquoise glazes that Linnware is commonly known for that first caught my eye and later stole my heart,” says Jo'burg education lecturer, amateur historian and avid collector, Marian Baker.

“I've been a sporadic collector of Linnware ever since I was first introduced to it in the early 1990s. Over the years, I've acquired bits and pieces at good prices from second-hand shops, but occasionally I splurge when I find a very special piece at an antique dealer,” she smiles as she lifts up a large rust-coloured glazed vase she recently acquired.

“As my collection grew, along with my knowledge of Linnware, I started to admire and appreciate the beautiful forms created during their two-decade production run. The modernist and later mid-century modern, organic-shaped pieces are my favourites,” she adds.



**ABOVE:** A selection of glazed soup bowls. Clockwise from top: rare brown-mauve, deep turquoise, khaki-rust, turquoise, and cream-yellow ochre.



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF LINNWARE

Although Linnware officially produced wares from 1943 – 1962, its intriguing story starts way back with the founding of Transvaal Pottery by Randlord, Sir Thomas Cullinan.

In 1907, Sir Thomas invited a ceramic engineer from Stoke-on-Trent in England to ascertain the viability of clays used at the premises of Consolidated Rand Brick, Pottery and Lime (Conrand Company) in Olifantsfontein, near Pretoria.

The go-ahead was given and full-scale production of industrial pottery and creamware started in 1908. The pottery factory employed, among others, 30 potters and artists from England.

The huge financial investment never paid off, the non-existence of import tax was greatly to blame, and Transvaal Pottery shut its doors eight years later, and most of the skilled English staff was repatriated. Ironically, during WWI, imported ceramics became virtually impossible to obtain in South Africa.

In 1925, Gladys Short and Marjorie Johnson hired the vacant Transvaal Pottery premises from Cullinan and started Ceramic Studio, producing crockery, decorative tiles and even a small range of sculptures.

In 1943, after almost 22 years of relative success, Ceramic Studio's production started to dwindle, mostly because of a dire shortage of glaze components from England, due to WWII.

The Cullinan family, who'd become good friends with the Ceramic Studio staff, came to the rescue, buying out The Women of Olifantsfontein as they'd become known.

The name was changed to Linnware and the Cullinans retained a large part of the original staff, continuing production until the pottery finally closed in 1962.

TEXT: DERICK KIRK PHOTOGRAPHS: HEMA PATEL



Marian's eclectic collection of Linnware and work from Ceramic Studio includes bowls, plates, chargers, vases, vessels and even some rare artist-signed works. “The signed works are particularly special. They show not only the year when they were made, but also give me a rare insight into the potters who created them.

“I used to use the crockery for dinner parties, but a few pieces were chipped and damaged. Now the crockery is for display only, but I love to use the vases to hold fresh flowers. Linnware is just too gorgeous to hide away in a cupboard.” GH

**THIS PAGE:** 1 Very early Ceramic Studio ashtray, marked 'Cullinan' on the reverse side. 2 Footed vase, circa 1950, in deep cream and burnt sienna. 3 Large vase with unique rust-coloured glaze. 4 Amorphous blue-green water lily-shaped charger. 5 One of a pair of candleholders from the mid-1940s. 6 Condiment pourer. 7 Modernist slotted flower vase.

## TIPS FOR ASPIRING COLLECTORS

- “Once you know what you're looking for, Linnware is quite easy to identify. But the signature turquoise glaze can sometimes be mistaken for less desirable Globe pottery,” says antique dealer, Carl Landsberg.
- Cape Town ceramics aficionado, Justin Kerrod adds, “Markings under the wares vary from year to year. Look out for glaze painted Linnware (sometimes spelled Lynnware, Lin Ware or Linware) along with a date. The factory also used a LW stamp, or Zulu Hut stamp, and later, a gold Linnware sticker to identify their work. Some of the larger pieces like planters weren't marked and can only be identified by an expert in the field.”
- Prices of Linnware have rocketed over the past few years. Smaller pieces are easier to come by and won't cost you an arm and a leg. One can still pick up well-priced pieces at flea markets if you have a keen eye.
- Specialise in a period or style in a variety of different colours. Glazes included, among others, turquoise, rose, blue, grey, tobacco and the super rare mauve and lilac shades.

**Scorched Earth: 100 Years of Southern African Potteries** by Wendy Gers, Jacana, worth R750, is a history of fine art potteries in Southern Africa and includes a list of studios, potters and makers' marks. **WIN!** We're giving away one copy. To enter, **SMS POTTERY**, your name and e-mail address to 48406. An SMS costs R1,50, errors will be billed and free SMSes don't apply. For full Ts&Cs, see page 61.



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